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Boosting average orders

Paul Miller. Catalog Age. New Canaan: Jun 1999. Vol. 16, Iss. 7; pg. 89, 2 pgs

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Abstract (Document Summary)

This year, 89% of the business-to-business catalog participants in Catalog Age Benchmark Reprt on Marketing posted average order sizes of more than \$150, compared to just 59% the previous year. B-to-b mailers cite adding promotional sale mailings to spur more orders from their main catalogs; offering discounts, free merchandise and gifts for larger orders, and upselling on the phone as strategies to boost average orders - and in some cases, response rates.

Full Text (920 words)

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[Headnote]

B-to-b techniques to fuel customer spending per order

This year, 89% of the business-to-business catalog participants in the CATALOG AGE Benchmark Report on Marketing (February issue) posted average order sizes of more than \$150, compared to just 59% the previous year.

B-to-b mailers cite adding promotional sale mailings to spur more orders from their main catalogs; offering discounts, free merchandise, and gifts for larger orders; and upselling on the phone as strategies to boost average orders-and in some cases, response rates.

WearGuard, a \$250 million uniforms cataloger, has seen its average order size increase from less than \$200 three years ago to \$380 this year, says vice president of sales Tom McDermott. WearGuard credits the average order hike primarily to a focus on targeting bigger companies, which typically place larger orders, rather than smaller companies with less than 10 employees. He won't specify what percentage of customers are from larger companies now compared to three years ago.

WearGuard also keeps its lists clean and eliminates marginal customers, "so we end up with our top buyers," McDermott says. Beyond that, the Norwell, MA-based mailer promotes "hurdled" offers to get customers to spend more than their typical price threshold. For instance, a free jacket offered to customers who spend more than \$350 "might get customers who plan to spend \$300 to spend more," he says.

What's more, WearGuard has increased its outbound telemarketing campaign over the past few years, thereby forming closer relationships with customers that spend \$5,000 or more. And WearGuard has an aggressive inbound telephone upselling strategy, in which sales reps offer phone customers unadvertised product specials. "The items aren't necessarily discounted products, but fast-selling catalog items that we offer to customers while they're on the phone with us," McDermott says. "Even though the products are good sellers, we can afford to discount them because we have customers on the phone already, so our marketing cost at that point is zero. Even better, we need only offer a 5% discount, because since you have them on the phone, it doesn't take a deep

discount to upsell them."

Cross-selling and upselling have also helped Los Angeles-based Viking Office Products improve its average order size 15% over the past three years, says Sean Clough, vice president of marketing for U.S. operations. "If, for example, a customer is buying ring binders and hasn't bought indexes, we offer him indexes while he's on the phone," he says. "And when customers buy quantities close to the size of the master cartons, we'll step them up to get us incremental dollars. So if the customer is buying eight reams of copy paper, we'll step him up to 10 reams by offering pricing incentives."



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WearGuard's average order has increased from less than \$200 in 1996 to \$380 this year.

Like WearGuard, the \$1.4 billion-plus Viking, which hopes to increase its average order an additional 6% over the next year, also offers unadvertised specials to phone customers, Clough says. And in recent years the company has made a conscientious effort to expand its product offerings beyond basic office supplies to larger-ticket items, such as office furniture, computer supplies, and imaging supplies.

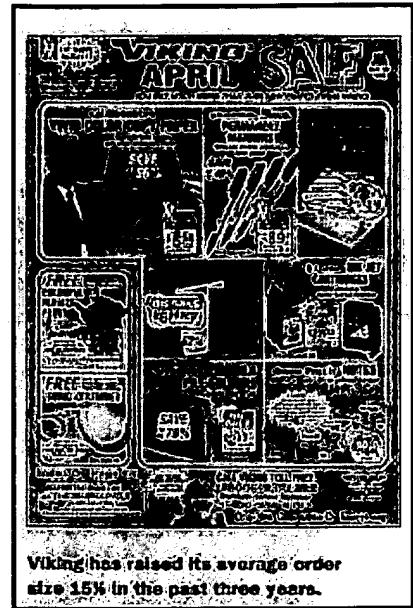
Indeed, offering greater breadth of product has helped other companies, such as Colchester, CT-based S&S Worldwide, build up average orders. Among S&S's 18 institutional products catalogs, which include S&S Education, S&S Healthcare, and S&S Recreation, average order size has increased 12%-15% over last year, says marketing director Keith House. The company has steadily increased the number of SKUs in its catalogs and also bumped up the number of promotional sales flier mailings in recent years.

S&S mails two sales fliers a year to customers and prospects, and for most orders, "we find that 50% of the items ordered are from sales fliers just received, while 50% come from customers referring back to the annual catalogs," House says. "So the fliers give the catalogs a boost, pushing up the average order."

What effect on response?

An increase in average order size can result in lower response rates if companies are combining smaller but more frequent orders into one. But all the business catalogers contacted say that's not been their experience. At Viking, "we're increasing response as well," Clough says. "We have to, because we're under extreme competitive pressure from our parent company [superstore retailer] Office Depot, and from [cataloger] Quill Corp. So we have aggressive direct mail programs, and even compete head-to-head with Office Depot [which has a catalog] in some cases."

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Viking has raised its average order size 15% in the past three years.

S&S Worldwide is holding the line on response rates. "We still get the same response percentage, and we simply get larger orders," House says. "With a greater average order, we gain efficiencies as we get more product lines per order, because our operating costs to fill the larger orders don't increase proportionately, so we gain in profitability. And in theory, inventory should turn more quickly."

For its part, WearGuard is "most concerned with dollars per customer," McDermott says, rather than response and average order numbers. "But when customers are placing larger orders, you know they'll come back over and over."

WearGuard is counting on outbound telemarketing efforts to push its average order size even higher, McDermott says. Customers might be accustomed to buying only one type of product from the company, "but when an outbound service rep calls them and lets them know what other products we offer, we can get the full potential out of those customers," not to mention larger orders.

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Real-time, interactive sales and services across the Internet: Optimizing the customer experience

Wendell Lansford. **Call Center Solutions.** Norwalk: Nov 1998. Vol. 17, Iss. 5; pg. 54, 4 pgs

Subjects: Telemarketing, Electronic commerce, Internet, Salespeople, Market strategy, Web browser

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Abstract (Document Summary)

Many companies are finding that a major requirement for optimizing customer contact through the Internet is enabling connection to the most responsive customer interfaces ever built: live, human, company representatives. The concrete benefits of implementing a real-time, Web-based customer sales and service system are compelling: 1. shortened sales cycles, 2. increased ROI of existing sales and service operations, and 3. ability for reps to close transactions and proactively cross-sell/upsell customers in real-time. The challenge for organizations is to provide a system that will work for the universe of customers on the Internet.

Full Text (1554 words)

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Corporate Web sites are no longer just sources for marketing information; they've become channels for conducting business -- delivering pre-sales assistance, performing transactions and providing post-sales service and support. Leading organizations are extending their existing operations by integrating the Internet into their sales and service processes. The overall goal: to optimize customer contact through the Internet as a way to build customer acquisition and retention.

Many companies are finding that a major requirement for doing this is enabling connection to the most responsive customer interfaces ever built: live, human, company representatives. This isn't surprising - most customers typically have a few final questions to ask before they place an order for a product or service; they want to better understand the online purchase procedure; and they want to be assured that their order will be correctly understood and processed. Indeed, Yankelovich Partners recently reported that 63 percent of Web users are unwilling to purchase online until there is more human interaction involved.

Web-based interaction between company reps and customers generally takes two forms:



* Visual collaboration in conjunction with a phone call. Today, this means separate phone and Internet connections; in the future, as Internet telephony advances and telephony-enabled PCs and browsers become more common, this will be a single connection with the PC serving as both the telephone and the browser.

* Visual collaboration with text communication. In this case, a private, real-time text-chat window allows the rep and the customer to communicate at the same time as they are collaborating online. This is important, as most home users do not have an extra phone line available while shopping online.

In both cases, visual collaboration adds extraordinary value over a simple telephone call or chat session. Reps can perform escorted browsing to guide customers to particular pages (crossselling/upselling), push files (documentation, sales collaterals) and software (a demo or software patch) or even deliver a sales presentation via the browser interface.

There are, however, several technical challenges to overcome when deploying real-time, interactive sales and service over the Web.

Benefits And Requirements

The concrete benefits of implementing a real-time, Web-based customer sales and service system are compelling:

- * Shortened sales cycles,
- * Increased ROI of existing sales and service operations,
- * Ability for reps to close transactions and proactively cross-sell/upsell customers in real-time,
- * Increased customer loyalty (and retention),
- * Higher recurring revenue.

There are, however, many considerations to take into account when selecting and deploying such an application. The solution needs to be effective for both the company and its customers. From the company's perspective, the application should map seamlessly to existing sales and service operations, provide enterprise-class functionality across the Internet and give managers the ability to optimize system and staff performance. Basic requirements include:

- * Mission-critical, highly available server systems,
- * Ease-of-use for customers, reps and system administrators,
- * Effective security protocols,
- * Straightforward integration with existing systems,
- * Comprehensive system management, monitoring and reporting capabilities,
- * The ability to work on all browsers and in all browsing environments.

From the customers' perspective, the solution needs to work - it needs to perform effectively across the fragmented, heterogeneous medium known as the Internet. And it needs to do this without requiring software downloads, installs or browser upgrades. The rest of this article discusses the reality of the Internet landscape and an architectural approach that achieves the ability to "work everywhere."

Barriers To Real-Time Sales And Service Operations

The challenge for organizations is to provide a system that will work for the universe of customers on the Internet. Unfortunately, this is not easy - there are at least a dozen different browser types, hardware and software platforms, and applications that need to be

supported for a sales and service application to work for all users.

Within the technology marketplace, we generally see a bell curve model of adoption, with more late adopters of new technologies than there are early adopters. Translation: the majority of Internet users have not yet upgraded to the latest version of Netscape or Internet Explorer. However, in response to the dizzying pace of technology advances in this market, some Web designers have chosen to build their sites primarily for the latest browser versions (e.g., "This site best viewed with Netscape Communicator 4.0 or later"). While this gives designers the ability to use advanced technologies as they build a site, middle-of-the-curve technology adopters don't get optimal service, and often feel frustration and resentment when they can't access particular parts of a site.

Moreover, in the corporate environment there is an added challenge. Security concerns among many corporations have led them to deploy measures such as firewalls to protect the integrity of their data and restrict access to the network; these same security measures often prevent the use of certain advanced technologies such as Java. Since this corporate user base is the foundation of business-to-business e-commerce, it is an absolute requirement to address the unique limitations and characteristics of the corporate environment in which they work. Applications that require Java do not effectively address typical firewall and Extranet configurations, inhibiting a company's ability to conduct business with its customers and partners.

"The business-to-business category is complex not only because these ebusiness solutions must be especially reliable and manageable, but also because of the challenges in integrating and providing optimal connectivity through secured networks," said Allen Bonde, director of Advisory Services at The Extrprise Group, an e-business consulting and systems integration firm.

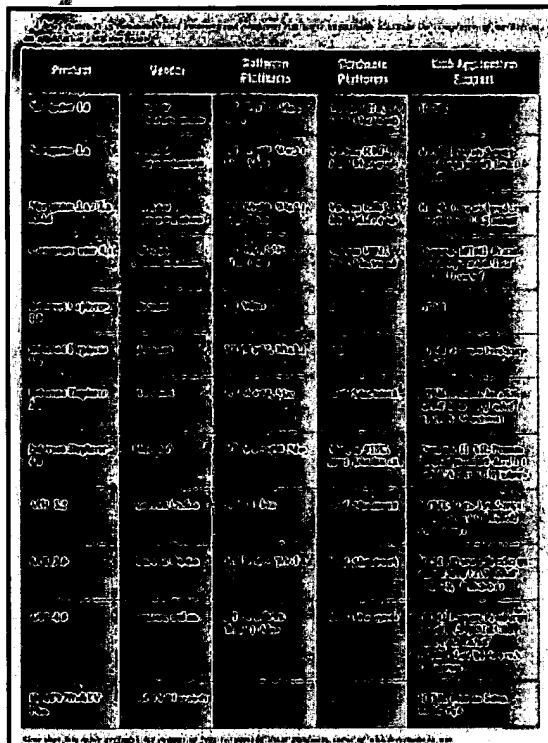
Guiding Principles For Architecture Development

There are two guiding principles for developing a real-time customer service solution. To put a system in place, companies must provide an optimal customer experience for the entire spectrum of users, from advanced technology adopters to those lagging well behind the adoption curve. Second, it is important to use universal Web browsing technologies that are seamless and completely unobtrusive to the user the customer should not be required to download or install additional software nor upgrade to the latest browser.

"This kind of solution makes a lot of sense for the Internet marketplace," added Bonde. "We are starting to see a movement toward 'customer-focused ebusiness' rather than a one-size-fits-all approach among leading companies. For example, adapting to the customer's preferences and their computing environment can ensure they will receive an optimal system that meets their particular needs."

Technology That Works Everywhere

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A brief summary of commonly used browsers and platforms can serve to partially illustrate the complexity of the Web as an application platform today:

To address these two principles for real-time customer service, you need a platform that allows sophisticated Web applications to be created in a way that targets users across a wide variety of environments while presenting a consistent and well-understood set of functions to end users. Technology is now available to do this.

The technology "sniffs out" the user's environment and instantly alerts representatives of the capabilities the user's platform can accept. For example, a potential customer is looking to purchase office supplies on a merchant's Web site and seeks live assistance. This customer is coming in from an Internet Explorer 4.0 browser and is connecting through a firewall that strips out Java. When the customer connects to the live service area on the Web site, the technology automatically detects that a link is being established from behind a firewall and that Java has been disabled across the company's network. This information is then used to generate an optimal client interface that will work within the customer's browser environment.

The end result of this invisible analysis: advanced Internet users with the latest systems can enjoy the benefits of advanced technology features, and those with more restrictive environments can still benefit from real-time, interactive communication.

How It Works

Built-in technology sensors detect the browser vendor and version, operating system, hardware platform, network environment and available application technologies (such as plug-ins) of a user coming into a session. A matrix is then composed to define the optimal performance mix of components based on the user's browsing environment. Concurrently, information about different user interface components and application capabilities supported is stored in a central repository.

The final stages of the process, which is completed automatically in milliseconds, takes the input from the sensors and transforms it into a set of components according to mappings prescribed in the matrix. The interface builder then retrieves components from the repository and assembles a functional application interface that is delivered to the user via a standard Web server.

Platforms For Growth

As companies embrace the Web as an infrastructure that supports all of their business functions, they require a framework that can sustain growth both in terms of the number of users it supports and in the ability to incorporate advanced new technologies. By providing a platform for optimal customer experiences and increased customer satisfaction through real-time interaction, this new

technology will directly impact the rate of customer acquisition and retention - the driving force behind growing a business on the Web.

[Author Affiliation]

Company president and CEO Wendell Lansford cofounded SiteBridge Corporation in 1996. Previously, Lansford was the director of technology for CondeNet, the online division of Conde Nast Publications, where he was responsible for launching the Webbased properties Epicurious Food, Epicurious Travel and Swoon. He also has experience in IT consulting with Internet Consulting Corporation, as well as technical experience in Intranet architectures and network management at Bellcore.

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Sideware Launches Live E-Commerce Customer Service From Improved Storefront

Business Editors/Technology Writers. Business Wire. New York: Jan 14, 1999. pg. 1

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Abstract (Document Summary)

The improved, user-friendly design offers a full range of features, including secure transactions, order processing, web services and live customer service. The new storefront continues to offer customers the convenience of shopping on-line for Sideware's complete family of products, while supporting customer inquiries by demonstrating Dr. Bean, its revolutionary e-commerce customer service software. The storefront will run in parallel to the existing web site at www.sideware.com for a couple of weeks to ensure a smooth transition, then it will replace the existing site.

Dr. Bean is a value-added product that can be integrated with IBM middleware products, like DB2, Net.Commerce and Websphere to create e-commerce solutions. For instance, when Dr. Bean is integrated with Net.Commerce, the customer service representative (CSR) can view the customer's shopping history. Companies can use Dr. Bean to deliver live, personalized customer service over the Internet from their own e-commerce site. This innovative product, written in 100% Java, adds interactive exchange to Internet web sites enabling companies to personalize a customer's purchase experience at their sites. E-commerce CSRs equipped with Dr. Bean can take control of customers' browsers and lead them through web pages on a guided tour, or follow them to assess their purchasing interests. With a single mouse click, customers can access and "chat" with a live CSR about sales specials, alternate products, shipping or any other service questions.

Full Text (716 words)

Copyright Business Wire Jan 14, 1999

VANCOUVER, British Columbia--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Jan. 14, 1999-- Sideware (VSE:SYD) will launch its improved storefront, featuring Dr. Bean and showcasing e-commerce value-added solutions integrated with IBM middleware on Monday January 18th, 1999.

Any company that plans to create a customer-to-business web site can take advantage of Sideware's engineering capabilities.

The improved, user-friendly design offers a full range of features, including secure transactions, order processing, web services and live customer service. The new storefront continues to offer customers the convenience of shopping on-line for Sideware's complete family of products, while supporting customer inquiries by demonstrating Dr. Bean, its revolutionary e-commerce customer service software. The storefront will run in parallel to the existing web site at www.sideware.com for a couple of weeks to ensure a smooth transition, then it will replace the existing site.

"We've developed an excellent model for companies to experience the power of live, personalized customer service using Dr. Bean," said John Wedel, General Manager E-Business Solutions Division for Sideware. "The benefits of this enhanced storefront

are twofold, this is an opportunity to experience the technology and set a new benchmark for improving Sideware's overall customer service. This is a tremendous advantage for Sideware and our customers."

Dr. Bean is a value-added product that can be integrated with IBM middleware products, like DB2, Net.Commerce and Websphere to create e-commerce solutions. For instance, when Dr. Bean is integrated with Net.Commerce, the customer service representative (CSR) can view the customer's shopping history. Companies can use Dr. Bean to deliver live, personalized customer service over the Internet from their own e-commerce site. This innovative product, written in 100% Java, adds interactive exchange to Internet web sites enabling companies to personalize a customer's purchase experience at their sites. E-commerce CSRs equipped with Dr. Bean can take control of customers' browsers and lead them through web pages on a guided tour, or follow them to assess their purchasing interests. With a single mouse click, customers can access and "chat" with a live CSR about sales specials, alternate products, shipping or any other service questions.

For a demonstration of Dr. Bean or to access more information on Sideware's e-commerce solutions, visit Sideware's Internet Web-site at <http://www.sideware.com>.

Sideware offers a family of software products that use its patented concurrent technology to produce user-friendly, collaborative and e-commerce solutions. Net Notions(tm) is an easy- to-use groupware messaging system that provides instant communication through a "sticky note" interface. Hot Notions(tm) is a free groupware messaging service that offers a unique and exciting means of travelling the Internet. Tagalongs(tm) is an easy-to-use personal annotation product that lets users peel off an electronic note, write or record sound on it, and link it to web pages, files and documents. For further information on Sideware's products or services, please visit the following web sites: www.sideware.com or www.hotnotions.com

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OWEN JONES

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